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AUTHOR Sova, Ann D.
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ABSTRACT

In fall 1985, a study was conducted at Broome Community College (BCC) in Binghamton, New York, to determine whether students who added a class on or after the first class meeting (i.e., late admits) were at greater risk of withdrawing or failing than students who registered on time (i.e., regular admits). Final grades awarded to students in ENG 090 (a non-credit developmental writing course) and ENG 110 (the required freshman composition course) were examined, yielding the following results: (1) of the 1,673 students enrolled in the two courses in fall 1985, 76.1% finished with a grade of D or better; (2) the passing rate in ENG 110 (78.3%) was higher than that for ENG 090 (47.6%); (3) 14.6% of the ENG 090 students withdrew and 21.8% failed the course, compared with 16.5% of the ENG 110 students who withdrew and 4.5% who failed; (4) among regular admits, 81.10% passed the courses, 1.88% failed, 15.98% withdrew, and 1.04% received an incomplete; (5) among late admits, 50.43% passed, 26.92% failed, 19.23% withdrew, and 3.42% received an incomplete; and (6) among late admits, 52.8% passed ENG 110, but only 38.5% passed ENG 090. (LAL)

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The INSTITUTE for COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH

BROOME COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
P.O. BOX 1017
BINGHAMTON, N.Y. 13902
(607) 771-5000

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A STUDY OF THE SUCCESS RATE OF LATE ADMITS IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH AT THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

by

Ann D. Sova

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A Study of the Success Rate of Late Admits in Freshman English at the Two-Year College

Ann D. Sova

Broome Community College

Binghamton, New York

Spring 1986

INTRODUCTION

Like many other instructors, I plan carefully for the first day of class, believing that it is one of the most important of the semester. Not only do I distribute and explain the course outline, identify the text books, and indicate the requirements, but I also try to establish the importance of my course, and engage students in some activity designed to dispel their fears and arouse their interest in the subject matter. Many instructors do the same sort of thing on the first day, hoping that by starting off on an interesting and positive note, the whole semester will go more smoothly and productively. We would never dream of just passing out the course outline and sending the students off after fifteen or twenty minutes to buy their books. And yet, what happens in the next class? Chances are, several of the students we so carefully introduced to the course the first day will be gone, and six new students will arrive, clutching their computer forms and asking what they missed. The same thing happens in the third class. The late admits and section switchers continue to come and go into the second and even third week of the term. That carefully prepared introduction to the course is never heard by a significant number of the eventual course members.

The frustration of trying to get a course going smoothly under these circumstances has caused a number of my colleagues to suggest that the college stop enrolling late

admits. It is disruptive, they argue, to have new students entering a class after the first day. They are right; it is disruptive. But there is a more serious concern with late admits than the inconvenience they cause, and that is their success rate. I have noticed over the past several years that students who enter late tend not to complete the course successfully, either because of withdrawal or failure. If my experience is typical of what other instructors are seeing in their classes, if late admits do tend not to succeed in their courses, is it worth the time and effort to enroll them? In a college with an open admissions philosophy and declining enrollments it is unrealistic to suppose that potential students will be turned away just because they register late. But, if these students are more likely than others to fail, the college should devise procedures to identify and assist them. This paper will report the results of a study undertaken at Broome Community College in Binghamton, New York to determine if, in fact, late admits are at greater risk of withdrawing or failing than regular admits. Broome is a comprehensive two-year college offering associate degrees in Liberal Arts, Business, Allied Health, and Engineering Technology. The college draws its 4800 FTE's from the suburban area around Binghamton, and is 97% white.

METHOD

To test the hypothesis that late admits tend to drop out or fail at a higher rate than the students who register on time, I examined the final grades awarded to students in ENG 090 (Basic Language Skills), a non-credit developmental writing course, and ENG 110 (Written Expression I), the college's required freshman English course, during the Fall 1985 semester. All entering students at Broome are tested in reading, writing, and math, and placed in appropriate courses based on their scores. I limited my investigation to these two entry-level English courses, reasoning that almost all first semester freshman would enroll in one or the other, giving me a large and representative sample from which to draw conclusions.

The Computer Center provided me with printouts of the names and ID numbers of all students adding or dropping ENG 090 or ENG 110 on or after August 26, 1985, the first day of classes. The printouts also included the number of the section being dropped or added and the date of the transaction. By cross-referencing the drop and add files, I could identify and eliminate from my study the students who were simply changing from one section to another; I did not consider them late admits. I could also identify the students who entered late and subsequently withdrew from the course. (At BCC students may drop courses through the third week with no mark on their transcripts. From the fourth week

through the tenth, all who withdraw receive a W grade. After the tenth week the grade is recorded as an F. In compiling the data for this study, I listed all formal withdrawals before the tenth week as W's, and those after as F's, in accordance with college policy.) Having identified the students who entered late and formally withdrew, either with an F or a W, I needed to look at final grades to determine how many students had passed and failed the course.

To determine how the late admits compared to the students who registered on time, I examined the End of Semester Grade Report for Fall 1985, which listed, by section number, the number of seats used and the distribution of final grades, as of the end of the semester. This report allowed me to calculate how many ENG 090 and ENG 110 students completed their course successfully (success being defined as an A, B, C, or D), and how many were unsuccessful, receiving an F or an I. The End of Semester Report does not include withdrawals. To obtain that number I subtracted the number of grades awarded from the number of seats used as of the third week tally. I realized that there would have been some drops by that time, but trusted that the number of adds would have off-set them. That did, in fact, turn out to be the case, as I discovered by comparing the third week tally with the first day tally. These calculations gave me a good approximation of the number of students originally enrolled in ENG 090 and ENG 110, and the number receiving passing grades, Incompletes, F's, or W's. To compare the success

rate of regular (on time) admits with late admits required subtracting the number of late admits in every category from the total figures.

RESULTS

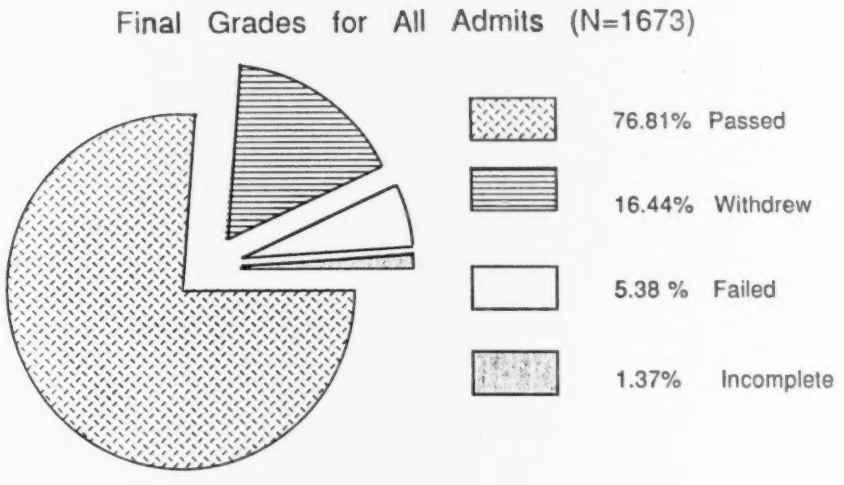
As the figures in Table 1 show, 1673 students enrolled in ENG 110 and ENG 090 in the Fall 1985 semester. More than three quarters of them finished the course successfully with a grade of D or better. Slightly less than a quarter of the total enrollment failed to complete the course because they withdrew, failed, or took an Incomplete. While this study was not concerned with comparing Basic Language Skills (ENG090) students to Written Expression I students (ENG110), it can be seen that the success rate for the latter is higher, as one would expect.

Table 1: Final Grades for ENG 110 and ENG 090, All Admits

	ENG 110	ENG 090	Total
Enrolled	1591	82	1673
Passed	1246 (78.3%)	39 (47.6%)	1285 (76.1%)
Failed	72 (4.5%)	18 (21.8%)	90 (5.38%)
Withdrew	263 (16.5%)	12 (14.6%)	275 (16.44%)
Incomplete	10 (.6%)	13 (15.9%)	23 (1.3%)

An interesting comparison can be made between the number of students who dropped the course (W), and those who failed (F). The higher drop rate suggests that many students may have withdrawn rather than taking a chance on failing. Figure 1 shows in graphic form the percentage breakdown of the total number of students who were successful and unsuccessful in completing ENG 110 and ENG 090.

Figure 1



Breaking down the figures above into regular admits and late admits, we are able to see how the two groups compare. Table 2 shows the success rate of the students who enrolled in ENG 110 or ENG 090 before the first day of classes. I am defining this group as the Regular Admits. It can be seen that their rate of success is higher than that of the entire ENG 110 and ENG 090 population.

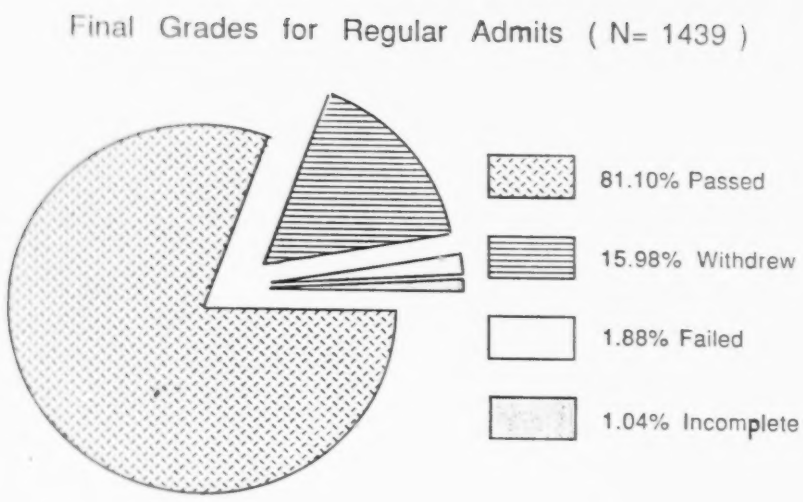
Table 2: Final Grades for Regular Admits

	ENG 110	ENG 090	Total
Enrolled	1396	43	1439
Passed	1143 (81.9%)	24 (55.8%)	1167 (81.10%)
Failed	17 (1.2%)	10 (23.2)	27 (1.88%)
Withdrew	229 (16.4)	1 (2.3%)	230 (15.98%)
Incomplete	7 (.5%)	8 (18.6%)	15 (1.04%)

The success rate for the total of regular admits, at 81.1%, was higher than that of all English enrollees, and the difference between withdrawals and failures even more pronounced; approximately 16% dropped out, while only 2% failed. Figure 2 shows the percentages of successful course completion, failure, withdrawal, and incomplete among regular

admits.

Figure 2



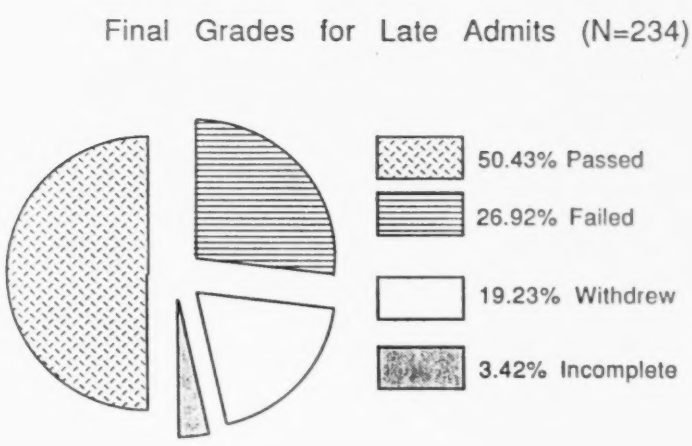
My hypothesis that late admits, those enrolling on or after the first day of classes, are less likely to pass the course was born out by the data in Table 3, showing the grades received by the 234 students in this population.

Table 3: Final Grades for Late Admits

	ENG 110	ENG 090	Total
Enrolled	195	39	234
Passed	103 (52.8%)	15 (38.5%)	118 (50.43%)
Failed	55 (28.2%)	8 (20.5%)	63 (26.92%)
Withdrew	34 (17.4%)	11 (28.2%)	45 (19.23%)
Incomplete	3 (1.5%)	5 (12.8%)	8 (3.42%)

As shown in Figure 3, a significantly lower percentage of late admits passed English, slightly more than 50%. More than a quarter failed, while nearly 20% withdrew. This was the only group in which the failure rate exceeded the dropout rate. The percentage of I grades was three times that of the regular admits. Figure 3 is a graphic representation of these results.

Figure 3



DISCUSSION

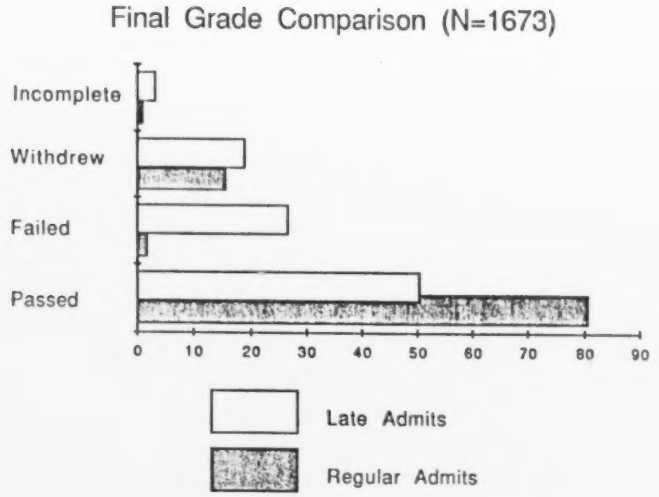
This study offers convincing evidence that students who enroll on or after the first day of classes are much more likely to fail or withdraw than students who enroll on time. That conclusion is so clearly supported by the data that it should be noted by college personnel concerned with retention and attrition. Table 4 summarizes how regular and late admits compare in successful course completion.

Table 4: Final Grade Comparison, Regular and Late Admits

	Regular Admits	Late Admits
Enrolled	1439	234
Passed	1167 (81.10%)	118 (50.43%)
Failed	27 (1.88%)	63 (26.92%)
Withdrew	230 (15.98%)	45 (19.23%)
Incomplete	15 (1.04%)	8 (3.42%)

The differences in success rates between these two groups can be appreciated more clearly, perhaps, by examining the percentages shown in Figure 4. While the pass rate of regular admits exceeds that of the late admits by over 30%, the late admits have higher percentages of failures, withdrawals, and incompletes.

Figure 4



One inference based on the comparative data of late admits to regular admits is that many of the F grades received by students result from unofficial drops, where a student's name remains on the roster even though he stops coming to class. That inference is supported by by own classroom experience and that of some of my colleagues, as well as the transcripts of late admits. Sixty-nine of those students who received F's or W's (29% of the total of late admits), received no credit for any of the courses they were enrolled in, with the exception of an occasional 1/2 credit physical education or learning skills course. It seems likely that the same interpretation is possible for a number

of the F grades received by regular admits. This hypothesis could be tested in two ways: by examining the transcripts of regular admits (or a random sample of them), and by examining attendance sheets for the 79 sections involved. (The attendance sheets however, could only identify the students who had given up by the sixth week, as official records of attendance are not required after that point.) I did not attempt to look at those records as a part of this study, but a more extensive examination of attrition patterns might well begin at that point.

I noted in my report of results that among regular admits the withdrawal rate was significantly higher than the failure rate. With the late admits that pattern was reversed. Based on my observations of both types of students in the classroom, the likeliest interpretation of this difference is that the regular admits tend to be better planners. They register on time and, when things don't seem to be going well in class, they decide that discretion is the better part of valor and drop out rather than take an F. The late admits, on the other hand, seem not to look too far ahead. They apparently decide to attend college at the last minute, and although 50% of them during the past semester did not complete the course and receive credit, only 19% decided to withdraw and take the non-punitive W grade.

Although it was not the purpose of my study to compare the success rates of students in Basic Language Skills, the remedial course, with those of students in Written Expression

I, it is clear that the students in ENG 090 have far lower success rates than those enrolled in ENG 110. Among the regular admits, while 78.3% of the students enrolled in ENG 110 passed the course, the pass rate for students in ENG 090 was only 47.6%. With the late admits, 52.8% of ENG 110 students passed, but only 38.5% of the ENG 090 were successful, making them the highest risk group examined in this study.

A number of interesting questions remain, including: why do some students defer the decision to attend college until the semester is about to begin (or already has begun) and, having enrolled, why is their dropout/failure rate so high? Beyond these questions is another: knowing that late admits are less likely to succeed than regular admits, what should the college do about it?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The results of this study of late admits to Freshman English classes in the Fall 1985 semester cannot and should not be interpreted to mean that entering late causes students to drop out or fail. As numerous studies have shown, there are many variables that affect retention/attrition, and it is likely that the complex configuration of factors that causes a student to withdraw also, in some cases, causes him to enroll late. In other words, both entering late and failing

to persist are the results of other factors which may be very difficult to isolate. Nevertheless, looking at late admits can be very useful. For one thing, they are a high risk population that is very easy to identify: anyone who shows up to register after classes have begun is a late admit. At this college, and possibly at many others, the late admits, despite their high risk factor, are less likely to receive needed assistance as they enroll. Because they enter late, they may miss hearing about or receiving help from the very student services designed to increase student success and persistence: orientation, placement testing, academic advising, counseling, financial aid advice. A first step toward improving retention, therefore, might include targeting late admits for special assistance. Special counselors should be available at the registration site to interview late admits as they prepare to enroll at the college, helping them to identify or clarify their academic and career goals, assuring that they take placement tests, and assisting them in building an appropriate schedule. Beyond that, late admits should be assigned to an academic adviser as soon as possible, and should be encouraged to meet with that person several times during the first few weeks of school. Orientation sessions should be offered to late admits on or shortly after registration to assure that they are familiar with college policies and procedures, location of facilities, and availability of student services. These suggestions are relatively modest ones, but they are based on

the principle that is being articulated more and more frequently in retention literature--that persistence is positively related to the students' sense of involvement with the college and its staff. Many of the late admits, without a doubt, have problems that are beyond the capacity of the college to solve, and will drop out despite our best efforts. But for many others, the personal contact with counselors and advisors that I have recommended may well make the difference that will encourage them to remain in school and complete their courses successfully.

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